The Provocations Behind the Tonkin Gulf Clash Two Years Ago, P. 3

Words Meant To Blaze In That Darkness Where LBJ's Conscience Ought To Be

"The cruelty of this war and the suffering it has caused the people of Vietnam are a constant reproach. . . . The pressure of events is remorselessly leading towards a major war. . . . The tragic error is being repeated of relying on force and military means. . . ."

—U Thant announcing his retirement

I. F. Stone's Weekly

VOL. XIV, NO. 27 September 12, 1966 WASHINGTON, D. C. 15 CENTS

The Hidden History of the Coming War in Thailand

There seems to be animosity at both ends of the political spectrum in the Senate to the Tonkin Bay resolution, a feeling that the Senate was conned. At the second session of the hearings Stennis is holding on the overcommitment of U.S. military power abroad, he was irritated when Secretary Rusk brought up the resolution as a constitutional basis for the war in Vietnam. Stennis said he thought that was standing "on mighty thin ice." The Mississippian seemed to think Congress was in dereliction of its constitutional duty when, in that resolution, it gave the President a blank check for war. "I am a guilty party," Stennis said ruefully, "if anyone is guilty on the Tonkin Bay resolution" and added that he was concerned about the "precedent it may set." Next day Senator Fulbright expressed similar misgivings after Arthur Sylvester, the Pentagon information chief, refused to discuss Thailand in public. "I feel," Fulbright said, "that I was led into the Tonkin Bay incident, and I only have myself to blame for it because I should have been more intelligent and more far-seeing and more suspicious." Then he added cryptically, "Now we are faced with what looks like it might be repetitious. . . ."

The Thais Call for U.S. Troops

The repetition to which Fulbright referred would create a second Vietnam in Thailand. On *Meet the Press,* Sept. 4, Wm. P. Bundy, the ex-CIA man who is now Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, tried to belittle the danger of direct U.S. combat against the guerrillas operating in Northeast Thailand. He claimed that our role is limited to equipment and training. But then Philip Geyelin, the *Wall Street Journal's* knowledgeable foreign policy expert, wanted to know "Hasn't the Embassy out there asked us to go a little beyond that role?" Mr. Bundy's reply was evasive. "Well," he said, "I wouldn't want to comment on possibilities that may have been suggested within the Government but I repeat, our major role is in equipment and training." Next morning Marquis Childs reported in the *Washington Post* that the Thai government is pressing for American helicopters and American crews to help "put down the Communist guerrillas in North Thailand."

Mr. Bundy admitted publicly for the first time that our "basic strength" in Thailand is now "about 25,000." That figure, it is disturbing to recall, is at least 5,000 more than the number we had in South Vietnam at this time two years ago. It was not reassuring when Mr. Bundy said the insurgency in Thailand "is on a very limited scale . . . on a scale that on the Vietnamese benchmark would be perhaps the level of '59 or '60." That is when Diem began to call for help. This is a good time to recall that Thailand is more than three times the size of South Vietnam and has twice as many people. If 300,000 men are too few to subdue the guerrillas in South Vietnam, several times as many may not be enough in Thailand.

Fulbright said he was dropping his hearings on information policy to focus attention on Thailand. We believe that if he goes back and takes a fresh look at the Tonkin Bay affair, he will find the two closely related. I thought at the time that the Tonkin Bay affair was a phoney, and tried to alert readers to the evidence of this.* I am presenting some new evidence this week of the provocations which led up to the Tonkin Bay incidents. Stennis said the resolution was aimed to counter aggression against the United States, not Vietnam. But operative paragraph (2) contains a "sleeper" saying the U.S. is prepared "as the President determines" to

(Continued on Page Two)

How to Keep U Thant at the UN

Lyndon Johnson has it in his power by a single telephone call to keep U Thant as Secretary General of the UN. The President could prove the sincerity of his appeals that U Thant remain in office by taking two steps which U Thant believes indispensable to the restoration of peace and of the UN's effectiveness. One would be to announce that in answer to U Thant's prayers the United States was calling off the bombardment of North Vietnam and asking him to begin new talks with Hanoi on mutual withdrawal of U.S. and North Vietnamese troops in the context of internationally supervised elections in South Vietnam, with all parties including the Viet Cong invited to participate. The other step would be to announce that the United States would make a major contribution to the universality U Thant sees as urgent for the UN by withdrawing American objections to Communist China's admission, leaving the difficult problem of Formosa's seat to the General Assembly.

(Continued on Page Four)

*** See the special Aug. 24, 1964, issue of this Weekly, as reprinted at p. 307 of Raskin and Fall's Vietnam Reader, and the p. 1 box "War Behind Our Backs," Aug 10, 1964.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continuel from Page One)

use its armed forces in aid of any member of SEATO "requesting assistance in defense of its freedom." Thailand is a member of SEATO, and under this clause Johnson can send troops at Thailand's request without resorting to our "constitutional process" as specified in the SEATO treaty. This blank check for trouble is what we were warned against by Morse and Gruening, the only two members of Congress who voted against the resolution.

The Tonkin Bay affair shows how adept the Johnson administration is at blowing up minor forays into international crises when it suits its purpose. It could on the same model wait for a guerrilla stab at one of our air bases in Thailand and then cry out that we were the victims of unprovoked aggression in violation of the UN Charter, the Nuremberg laws and Roberts' Rules of Order. Mr. Geyelin on TV asked Mr. Bundy whether the situation was not like that earlier in Vietnam when guerrillas attacked U.S. air bases and more troops were sent in to defend the bases and then "to chase the guerrillas that were attacking the air bases." Mr. Bundy replied with the air of a deeply aggrieved man, "the Thai are absolutely determined to deal with this themselves." If they are so "absolutely determined" why are they already calling for help?

When Goldwater Was Right

It is clear that we are dealing in the government with a crew of consummate fabricators. The foremost of them we are sorry to say is Lyndon Johnson himself. The truest words spoken in the 1964 campaign were in poor Barry Goldwater's remark that Johnson was "the biggest faker in the country." Any thoroughgoing Senate inquiry into the Thailand situation must ask how so clever and sweeping a resolution as the Tonkin Bay resolution came to be trotted out so swiftly in the Tonkin Bay affair. The first question to be asked is when and under what conditions did Thailand agree to permit U.S. air bases on its soil for the bombardment of Laos and North Vietnam, in clear violation of the most elementary international law. To permit U.S. air activity was to risk retaliation from its Communist neighbors. The Thais are not given to such adventurism without firm guarantees and quid pro quos.

An urgent question the Thais must have raised is what would happen if China and its neighbors retaliated by sending in guerrillas or even openly invading. Our first answer must have been that the Thais could invoke our aid under the SEATO treaty. But that treaty was one of John Foster Dulles's most tricky contraptions. To get Britain and France to sign, he had to agree that no military action could be taken under it without unanimous agreement. To get the treaty past the Senate (where only Langer voted against it), he had to include a phrase which says military action would not be automatic but would be taken only in accord with our "constitutional processes", i.e. after a declaration of war by Congress. The astute and wily Thais must have asked what would happen if Congress refused to vote a declaration of war? The Tonkin Bay resolution gave Johnson the blank check he needed to pay for bases in Thailand.

Now let us turn back to events in South Vietnam in 1964. General Khanh and Air Marshal Ky were asking for "bac tien"—a march north, presumably to invigorate Vietnamese army morale. Our people in Saigon feared a march north would lead to the collapse of Southern forces. If they couldn't deal with ill-equipped guerrillas in the South, how would they fare against Giap's fresh troops in the North? The committee will find we believe that to appease Khanh and Ky we promised instead to bomb the North and to widen commando raids against it. But for effective bombing of the North by jet bombers, Danang was too far. The nearest point was northeastern Thailand, where we put our bases.

A Fond Memory—But It Never Happened

"How deeply Mr. Johnson feels on this subject [minimum wages] was made movingly clear in the chat he had with reporters in Texas on his 58th birthday. He recalled that his first real battle as a Congressman in 1938 had been to force consideration of the original Fair Labor Standards Act, with its hourly pay floor of 25 cents."

—New York Times editorial, Sept. 2

The trouble with this Jack-The-Giant-Killer picture is that Johnson was a freshman Congressman when the bill came up. The Congressional Record shows he took no part in the floor debate, nor did he appear at the joint hearings held on S 2475, which was substituted for the House bill, HR 8580. He voted for the final measure, but there is no evidence that he "forced consideration" of the bill. Even his most laudatory campaign biographers never claimed he played any special part in enacting minimum wage legislation.

The Fullest Report on How the Other Side Sees the Way to Peace

"At the core of Hanoi's position, a source close to the Vietnamese Communists explained today is that the demand that U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam be 'unconditionally terminated' before any discussion of a Vietnam settlement can be undertaken. [Nguyen] Thuong [the senior North Vietnamese diplomat who delivered a personal message from Ho Chi Minh] is believed to have stressed this point in his talks with de Gaulle this afternoon. . . .

"Further outlining Hanoi's position, Thuong is said to have emphasized that his government favors the withdrawal of all foreign troops from South Vietnam so that 'the Vietnamese people can settle their problems themselves.' A source close to Thuong explained today that Hanoi wants 'a return to 1960, when all we had in South Vietnam was a civil war between the Saigon government and the National Liberation Front.' Under these circumstances the Liberation Front would be amenable to the formation of a coalition government with South Vietnamese civilian politicians.

"Elaborating on this point, the source explained that Hanoi's insistence on recognition of the Viet Cong as the 'sole representative of the South Vietnamese people' can be negotiated. He also stated that Hanoi's demand for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam is not a 'precondition' for negotiations. With rare candor, the source acknowledged the presence of North Vietnamese troops in the South, asserting that 'they did not commit aggression, as Mr. Dean Rusk claims, but responded to American aggression'."

—Stanley Karnow from Pnom Penh, Wash. Post, Sept. 1

"French diplomatic sources, presumably reflecting conversations held here with representatives of North Vietnam and South Vietnam's National Liberation Front, suggested today that the Communists might accept a two-year period as a 'reasonable' time for the proposed U.S. troop withdrawal. These sources also indicate that, should the U.S. formally announce its commitment to such a withdrawal, the Vietnamese Communists would not insist upon a cessation of hostilities as a prelude to negotiations aimed at settling the Vietnam war. It was recalled that talks to end the Korean war began before a truce."

—Karnow from Pnom Penh, Washington Post, Sept. 3

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Crisis Came in Handy

A re-examination of the Tonkin Bay affair by the Senate Foreign Relations committee will show that it served three purposes. It gave Johnson the blank check for war he needed to negotiate the use of Thai bases for bombing. It enabled him to satisfy the cries coming from Khanh and Ky that the U.S. by some strong action show that it was not "a paper tiger." It also gave Johnson a chance to steal some of Goldwater's thunder in the Presidential campaign. It would be interesting to know whether the resolution had actually been drafted *before* the events in Tonkin Bay.

Fulbright, talking to reporters after the Sylvester hearing last week, said that his committee had no more than a short executive session with Rusk before being asked to put the Tonkin resolution through the Senate. "It came down," he said, "to the question of whether the attack was provoked or unprovoked. . . ." Fulbright's shrug of the shoulders implied that he was dubious now of Rusk's assurances that the attacks were unprovoked. Even at the time, judging by odd items in the U.S. press, there was indication that the North Vietnamese were being harassed by commando and naval raids from South Vietnam and that our naval vessels were shielding the raiders. This provoked the clash.

A copy of the *Saigon Post* for July 23, 1964, which has just come into our hands and is reproduced in a box on the bottom of this page shows how extensive was the damage being claimed for these commando raids less than two weeks before the Tonkin Bay incidents. The details on the damage being done by the raids were not reported either in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* accounts of Ky's press conference, perhaps because information officers in Saigon, faced with Ky's embarrassing disclosure of commando raids on the North, and unable to deny them, adopted the tactic of disparaging their results. But even unsuccessful raids must have been enough to make the North Vietnamese nervous, and if the raids were only half as successful as Ky claimed, they were enough to put the North on guard against intruding planes and naval ships. Only a few days before the U.S. destroyer Maddox was fired on in the Gulf of Tonkin, Aug. 2, North Vietnam complained to the International Control Commission (*New York Times*, July 29, 1964) that U.S. and South Vietnamese warships had intruded into its territorial waters and carried away 11 North Vietnamese fishermen.

The knowledge of these covert activities may explain why the first reports from the Pentagon played down the attack on the Maddox. "Defense Department officials," the *New York Times* reported Aug. 3, 1964, "described the incident as unwelcome but not especially serious" and next day it reported, again from military sources, that "destroyers on patrol have sometimes collaborated with South Vietnamese hit-and-run raids on North Vietnamese cities, though the destroyers themselves stay in international waters." But there was no discussion of the trouble which might arise because North Vietnam has a 12-mile limit while we recognize only a 3-mile limit. Hanoi radio (*NYT* Aug. 15) admitted the Aug. 2 attack on the Maddox but said "Our boats came into action to protect our territorial waters and our people and to chase the enemy ship out of our waters." A Washington story in the same issue said there had been an increase in raiding activities "in recent weeks" and that "many American naval advisers" were going to sea with the South Vietnam raiders.

So much can be learned just by a cursory check of a few newspapers. Senators on the Foreign Relations Committee ought to be able to find out why the White House seemed to take the Maddox affair so much more seriously than the lower level Defense Department officials with whom reporters first spoke. There was a high level meeting at the White House Aug. 2 attended by LBJ, Rusk, Ball, Cyrus Vance and General Wheeler, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "and other top military and diplomatic representatives" (*N.Y. Times*, Aug. 3, 1964). That seems a lot of high brass for so minor an incident *unless plans were then laid to exploit it.* Next day Johnson called in the press and issued a "shoot to kill" order in case of further attacks but refused to take questions. The same day the giant aircraft carrier, Constellation, and three other warships, steamed out of Hong Kong (AP in *Wash. Star* Aug. 4), bound as it turned out

(Continued on Page Four)

Slippery Fellow

Sen. SYMINGTON: Is it not a fact that for many years one of the basic arguments for the foreign military program has been that it costs the U.S. much less to train and equip foreign soldiers than American soldiers?

Secretary RUSK: That is one of the points that has been brought out.

SYMINGTON: Is it not also a fact that with the exception of Koreans, no troops of any nation that has received assistance from the U.S. has even token fighting forces in Vietnam?

RUSK: Well, if you exclude Thailand and the Philippines because of size, and, after all the Thais—

SYMINGTON: The Philippines have no combat troops. I will check the Thailand figure. I got my figures from the Pentagon. I was surprised at your answer because they said all Thais were non-combat troops. I am talking about fighting forces.

RUSK: I think that is correct, sir, except that I do think we ought not to leave out South Vietnam.

—Stennis hearings on U.S. overcommitment, Aug. 30

Unless, of course, its desertion rate goes much higher.

The Provocations Behind the Tonkin Gulf Clashes

"Air Commander Nguyen Cao Ky told newsmen at the Bien Hoa air base there has been an overall 40 percent increase in air operations aimed at sending Special Forces teams in North Vietnam. The official admission came as unconfirmed reports by Vietnamese sources told of widespread explosions rocking industrial centers and harbor areas in North Vietnam since July 10.

"I cannot assure that all provinces of North Vietnam would be bombed, but at least Hanoi should be destroyed,' the young Air Force chief said, as he revealed that Vietnamese pilots are being trained to carry out special missions in North Vietnam.

"Vietnamese sources yesterday said that widespread explosions, attributed to the work of South Vietnamese commando units, have destroyed key industrial and harbor targets in North Vietnam since July 10. **(Italics added).**

"The sources said that South Vietnamese commandoes blew up one end of the Swing bridge in Haiphong on July 14, including an adjacent warehouse, causing an interruption of traffic whereby vehicles had to be detoured through Kien An. At the warehouse, the sources said, the explosion seriously damaged the propellor of a Communist Chinese freighter, killing an estimated 100 laborers, including 14 Red Chinese crewmen.

"In his briefing yesterday, Air Commander Ky said the U.S. has no commitment to train Vietnamese jet pilots, but said that Thai officials have agreed in principle to help train Vietnamese jet pilots." ***—Saigon Post, July 23, 1964***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Either A Hoax or the Mildest Attack the U.S. Navy Ever Suffered

(Continued from Page Three)

later for Tonkin Bay. At 11:30 p.m. that night Johnson was on a nationwide TV broadcast announcing that a second attack had been made on U.S. destroyers and that he had ordered retaliatory raids on North Vietnam. Hanoi claimed this second attack was a hoax. The U.S. admitted that in the second attack, like the first, there had been no damage or casualties. If the second attack really happened, it was by our own account the mildest ever suffered by the U.S. Navy.

Like Stampeding Steers in Texas

Yet Johnson played this to the hilt as if it were an international crisis. On August 5, he characteristically chose the dedication of a new centre at Syracuse for "better understanding among all men" to deliver a bellicose address. He described the supposed Tonkin Bay attacks as "unprovoked . . . deliberate, wilful, systematic aggression" which had to be answered with "action." In the wave of excitement generated, he then put his blank check resolution through Congress in less than 48 hours. House and Senate were stampeded like a bunch of steers in a Texas roundup. That's how Johnson got the authority he may soon use to put U.S. combat troops into Thailand. And that's the story on which Fulbright ought to put the spotlight.

At the Geneva conference in 1954, the French agreed to withdraw their forces within two years. All de Gaulle proposed at Pnom Penh is that, as an earnest of good faith, we set forth in advance the withdrawal time for our own troops. This would (as in 1954) begin, of course, after *peace negotiations had ended, not before—as some silly American editorial writers have protested in their usual anti-de Gaullist frenzy. Since we keep saying that we will withdraw when a satisfactory peace has been negotiated, why not set a withdrawal time in advance, as a means of getting talks started? . . . Even if there had been freedom of campaigning and no restriction on candidates, the South Vietnamese elections would still be a fraud. Under the rules set in advance by the military for the constituent assembly to be elected, the generals may rewrite the constitution it drafts any way they please and only a two-thirds vote can override them. More than enough military candidates will be elected to give the Generals the one-third veto they need. . . . More on both subjects next week.*

(Continued from the box on Page One)

In the absence of any Johnson move in either direction, U Thant is asked to continue an exercise in stultification. To enjoy the fruits of a high office in which he cannot do his duty to humanity in so fateful a time must seem to as truly religious a man and a Buddhist as U Thant morally repulsive. He must see mockery in the very words with which Ambassador Goldberg pleaded with him to remain. The latter asserted again that the U.S. was prepared to withdraw its forces from Vietnam "as soon as the people there are enabled to determine their own future without external interference." But the greatest source of external interference is the American military occupation itself!

Similarly, while Mr. Goldberg said that the U.S. shared U Thant's "dissatisfaction . . . that the Organization has not yet achieved universality of membership," he added in the tricky and unctuous phraseology of the State Department that the U.S. would "welcome the day" when the UN includes "all genuinely independent States which are committed to the principles of the Charter." This means in practice that the U.S. goes on using its vast power to determine who is genuinely independent and who is really committed to the Charter. These are the supercilious standards used since Acheson's day to block universal membership and to keep Peking out.

The truth is that the nation least committed to the principles of the Charter is the United States. The assertion of a right unilaterally to intervene anywhere in the world we feel our interests or ideology calls for it is incompatible with the existence of a world organization. Guatemala, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Vietnam represent efforts to establish a Pax Americana in fundamental conflict with the Charter, as we would easily recognize if some other power, whether Russia or Germany or Japan were sending its planes and troops into other countries to enforce its will.

Remember that U Thant once blurted out in despair that the American people, if they knew the truth, would never support what their government was doing in Vietnam, and you begin to get some conception of the bitterness that lies behind this good and humane man's refusal any longer to acquiesce in the lofty impotence to which U.S. policy consigns him.

We'll Send Free Sample Copies of This Issue to Your Friends If You Send Us Stamped, Addressed Envelopes—Also PLEASE Send in Your Zip Numbers Urgent

I. F. Stone's Weekly 5618 Nebraska Ave., N. W. Washington, D. C. 20015

Please renew (or enter) a sub for the enclosed $5:

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... **Zip**.....**State**.....

9/12/66

For the enclosed $5 send a gift sub to:

(To) Name .....

Street .....

City ..... **Zip**.....**State**.....

For $5.35 extra send I. F. Stone's *The Haunted Fifties*

Indicate if announcement wished ☐

I. F. Stone's Weekly

5618 Nebraska Ave., N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20015

Second class postage paid at Washington, D. C.

NEWSPAPER

I. F. Stone's Weekly. Second Class Postage Paid at Washington, D. C. Published every Monday except in August, the last week in December and the first week in January and Bi-Weekly during July at 5618 Nebraska Ave., N.W., Washington, D. C. An independent weekly published and edited by I. F. Stone; Circulation Manager, Esther M. Stone. Subscription: $5 in the U.S.; $6 in Canada; $10 elsewhere. Air Mail rates: $15 to Europe; $20 to Israel, Asia and Africa.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED